Introduction to the Special Section on the Emergent Literacy and Language Early Childhood Checklist for Teachers (ELLECCT)

'Shared book reading' can be defined as a naturalistic and interactive routine in which an adult and child engage in dialogue and share joint attention on a book (Vogler-Elias, 2013). It is difficult to overstate the benefit of shared book reading interactions for children's language acquisition and emergent literacy skills. Indeed, *First Language* has published many studies demonstrating the value of shared book reading in the home (Farrant & Zubrick, 2013; Korat et al., 2013; *inter alia*), and exploring the factors that influence parents' language during book reading interactions (including parents' gender: Duursma, 2016; the child's own language skills: Schick et al., 2017; book genre: Leech & Rowe, 2014; Nyhout & O'Neill, 2013; the location of new vocabulary on the page, Evans et al., 2011). Importantly, it is not just the book texts themselves that are relevant, but the myriad ways in which parents go beyond what is written on the page. Such 'extratextual talk' includes talking about particular words, recasting children's sentences, and making connections between the text and events in the child's own life.

Research on the characteristics and benefits of shared book reading in the early childhood classroom lags behind research in the home. An obvious question is whether the richness of adult-child book sharing interactions can scale up when the adult is with a group of children or even a whole class, particularly given that children tend to be less engaged when involved with teacher-led group or whole-class activities (Powell et al., 2008). It appears that shared book reading does indeed scale up and bring benefits (e.g., for vocabulary learning, Dickinson & Smith, 1994; Okyay & Kandir, 2017), and that it can be used as the basis for interventions where aspects of language are taught explicitly (e.g., for vocabulary teaching, Dickinson et al., 2019). Nevertheless, teachers vary greatly in their shared book reading practices (Dickinson & Smith, 1994), and they tend to reference the actual text on the page only very rarely, thereby missing opportunities to engage pupils in discussions about print concepts (Gettinger & Stoiber, 2014). It would therefore be beneficial to improve the practices of teachers who are not using shared book reading as effectively as they could be. Despite young children's language skills being malleable and fosterable through teachers' use of specific language practices (Hadley et al., 2021), teachers receive little training in how to support oral language and emergent literacy growth (Weadman et al., 2021).

The new Emergent Literacy and Language Early Childhood Checklist for Teachers (ELLECCT) developed by Weadman, Serry and Snow (2022) is therefore very welcome. The ELLECCT is a comprehensive observational checklist designed to measure teachers' extratextual talk and the paralinguistic and nonverbal characteristics of their language during shared book reading. It aims to profile the quantitative and qualitative patterns of teachers' strategy use at a given timepoint, document changes following professional development, and contribute to pre-service and in-service training. In their article, Weadman et al. (2022) describe the development of the ELLECCT and its psychometric properties, and describe its potential application both in classroom training and in research.

The ELLECCT deserves attention. In this special section of *First Language*, the authors of four invited commentaries discuss how the ELLECCT might be used in practice and developed further.

The ELLECCT was developed in in Australia, and the first two commentaries consider how the ELLECCT might be used in early childhood classrooms in other countries, namely England (Reeves, 2022) and Sweden (Nordberg, 2022). The authors identify both opportunities and challenges in this

regard. In the third commentary, Mathers (2022) argues that a robust professional development approach will need to be developed to complement the ELLECCT, and she offers some evidence-based suggestions for what such an approach might look like. The final commentary focuses on the tool itself, by examining its psychometric properties (Dobinson & Dockrell, 2022). The commentators agree that the ELLECCT is a very promising tool. Furthermore, it is available free and to all on the *First Language* website, in the supplementary materials that accompany Weadman et al.'s (2022) article.

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